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Dear judges,

As The Banner continued to grow and expand its newsroom in 2025, so has our work using the Maryland Public Information Act and the federal Freedom of Information Act to fuel some of our most important investigative, enterprise and accountability journalism.

When a federal government report showed Maryland's rate of deaths from child abuse or neglect was among the highest in the nation, The Banner wanted to know more. What we learned through a year spent requesting - and fighting for - public records from the state was that it was evidence of an apparent crisis that had been building for nearly a decade.

We first reported through a [pair of stories](#) early in 2025 that Maryland officials weren't even sure how many children had died from abuse or neglect. They conceded their own data was riddled with errors, and for the first time the department backed legislation to increase transparency, which passed with widespread bipartisan support.

But the even bigger revelation came when we requested records related to the deaths. For months, our request was denied because we were told it was too burdensome to fulfill. Only after threatening to sue the state did officials admit the truth. [Many of the reports we asked for had never been written](#), a flagrant violation of the state's duty to track, investigate and prevent these tragedies. After we exposed this, officials reinforced the need to write detailed reports and compile the missing ones.

Public records were also key to The Banner's groundbreaking analysis that revealed for the first time the length and complexity of every Baltimore city middle and high school students' journey on public transit, which led to the startling conclusion that the state's public transit system makes it [nearly impossible for as many as 25,000 students to get to school on time each day](#). We showed that that reality affects their attendance, grades and even their futures.

In other reporting, The Banner was the only media outlet in the state to reveal that top officials in Gov. Wes Moore's administration, including Cabinet secretaries, have at times [communicated using a system that auto-deletes messages after 24 hours](#), leaving no record of certain discussions while conducting government business.

Hundreds of pages of documents obtained by The Banner through the state's public records law showed dozens of message threads created on the state's Google Chat platform with the "History is off" function activated. Selecting this setting automatically and permanently deletes messages 24 hours after they're sent.

In Baltimore County, Banner reporters spent weeks doggedly chasing how County Councilman

Todd Crandell [endangered police officers](#) after revealing a fully loaded handgun in a desk drawer in June 2024. The coverage started with a tip — a year after the incident — and led reporters to pursue court records and police reports, including [body camera footage](#), that the Baltimore County Police Department initially refused to fulfill.

Spokespeople for the department dodged calls, delayed responses and told a Banner reporter that both an incident report and subsequent body camera footage would “constitute an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy” and that the records contained “medical or psychological information about an individual.”

We successfully argued, based on Maryland public records law, that releasing the police reports and body camera footage were in the public interest, given Crandell's capacity as an elected official. The Banner [published](#) four [stories](#) last year about Crandell's legal challenges and the councilman announced in January 2026 he would not run for reelection."

After a Banner reporter in Montgomery County learned of a black mold issue at Goshen Elementary School, she obtained documents through a state PIA request that revealed [mold was a pervasive problem](#) in scores of Montgomery County Public Schools” more than 230 buildings. In all, the district received 670 work orders related to suspected mold during that period. These are among many instances of The Banner using state and federal public information laws to drive important journalism. For this, we submit this nomination for the James S. Keat Freedom of Information Award from the Maryland-Delaware-D.C. Press Association.

Sincerely,
Richard Martin
Senior Deputy Managing Editor